



STATE OF WISCONSIN, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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State Government Event reaches out to Superior Area Veterans

(MADISON) -- As one of four outreach events this autumn hosted by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) in a statewide effort to ensure that Wisconsin veterans are receiving the millions of dollars of federal benefits for which they are eligible, a one-day *Veterans Benefits Information Fair* (VBIF) was held on Friday, October 15, 2004, at the National Guard Armory in Superior, serving nearly 200 veterans and their family members. The event, presented in conjunction with other agencies such as the VA Hospital, VA Benefits Administration, veterans service organizations, and County Veterans Services Officers from northwestern Wisconsin, boosted to 17,350 the number of Wisconsin veterans and their family members who have been reached by the "I Owe You" campaign, resulting in \$250 million in new federal VA funding to assist Wisconsin veterans.

"Wisconsin is a national leader in its support for veterans -- and this outreach event is no exception," said Gov. Jim Doyle. "Our secret isn't complicated. We have tremendous cooperation with the federal Veterans Administration, county governments, local offices and, of course, the state of Wisconsin's citizens. I commend the department for this initiative and encourage Wisconsin veterans to learn about and access the benefits and services they have so richly earned."

"One of my main goals for the department," said Secretary John A. Scocos, "is to expand the department's outreach, through the 'I Owe You' campaign and also through a new initiative called 'Mission: Welcome Home,' to reach out to service men and women returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom."

"The 'one-stop shop' at Superior presented a forum for federal, state and local agencies to provide assistance to veterans, including information on federal VA health care benefits, state and federal home mortgage and home improvement loans, education and job training grants, and a host of information about other services and benefits," said Scocos.

Locally, the 724th Engineer Battalion returned from Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom) about eight months ago. One of the information fair attendees was Staff Sergeant Tom Wood, also the facility manager of the armory. He said about being back home in the United States, "This is definitely the greatest country in the world, with green grass and blue skies." He was glad to get back home to his wife, daughter, and twin 12-year-old boys after spending eleven months in Iraq. He was deployed for 15 months, returning home in April, 2004. "At today's information fair, I see a lot of veterans finding out about eligibility and getting registered (for benefits and services). I'd like to say thanks to all veterans who have served."

One fair attendee was Pat Lagrew, who wore a "Native American Vietnam Veteran" button. Lagrew said he came to the event from Red Cliff, to find out what he was eligible for, and to complete additional forms. Following his attendance and

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visit to the various information booths, WDVA's Tribal Services Coordinator, Nate Nez, whose office is in Park Falls, Wisconsin, followed up offering additional assistance.

Jim Nelson, a Korean War Veteran from Duluth, Minnesota said, "I came over here because I didn't know of anything similar to this in Duluth, but I do know CVSOs in Minnesota work with veterans. When I went over to the VA booth, I learned about health care."

Edward Erickson, a 76-year-old Navy and Air Force veteran of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam and a member of the Superior City Council, said, "This information fair is the best possible way to communicate with veterans. There are a lot of things available here to veterans that they may not know about but they can find out about here."

Erickson worked for the WDVA during the 1970s as a service officer in the department's Milwaukee office, then as Milwaukee County Veterans Service Officer. "It's good to come here and see so many people who have worked for the department so long and know their jobs. I came here to thank Secretary Scocos and express appreciation for what the department has done. Superior is so far removed from Madison, and it's nice to see people bring information here."

On September 20th, Secretary Scocos announced a new "Mission: Welcome Home" initiative, to encourage all citizens to help integrate and reintegrate service men and women back in to their communities, by providing information, welcome home materials, and a social support network. "The information fair was one of four planned to take place this autumn on or near tribal reservations. Clearly, the outreach by WDVA to veterans is intertwined with the work we do welcoming new veterans -- my department is here as a resource for all veterans, including those newly returning to Wisconsin."

Veterans and their spouses and survivors who were unable to attend the Superior information fair are strongly encouraged to attend one or both of the next events, coming up on **Friday, October 22, 2004, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.** at the **Lake of the Torches Resort** in **Lac du Flambeau**, located at 510 Old Abe Road, and on **Friday, October 29, 2004, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.** at the **Menominee Hotel** in **Keshena**, located at N277 Highway 47. Or, contact a local county veterans service officer (CVSO), visit the WDVA website (<http://dva.state.wi.us>), or call WDVA toll-free at 1-800-WIS-VETS (1-800-947-8387).